

MY ULSTER

AT THE SIGN OF THE THREE GOLD BALLS.

I.

I HELD it truth, with him who sings
To one clear harp in divers tones,
That Levi Isaacstein gave loans
On overcoats and other things.

And I bethought me—hence these tears !—
There is a loss in gain to match ;
But who may stretch a hand to snatch
The far-off interest of years ?

In April did we too disband,
I spouted thee, O ulster mine,—
Ah, better to be drunk with wine,
To dance with death, ay, or pound sand,

Than that the boys should point in scorn
What time October's red and gold
Have fallen from all the hills, " Behold,
His ulster is not overworn ! "

II.

Old Jew, whose sole thought is to hoard,
Whose clutch is ever on thy pelf,
My ulster lieth on thy shelf,
Wrapped round with paper, tied with cord.

The seasons bring the flowers again,
And bring the firstling to the flock ;
And many things to swell thy stock
They bring to thee from needy men.

And still the months steal on by stealth
Till winter comes,—ah, ne'er, I fear,
Shall I before thy face appear,
And slap thee down the needful wealth !

With words, like weeds, I'll wrap me o'er,
Like coarsest clothes against the cold ;
But that large grief which these enfold
Weeps for the ulster once I wore.

H.

AIRLIE AT THE GAELIC SOCIETY'S MEETING.

DEAR MAISTER GRIP,—What for was I no born a Hielander ? That was the verra question I keepit pittin' tae masel as I sat in the Victoria hall the ither nicht an' listened tae the wild music o' the bagpipes playin' a pebroch. Hech ! hech ! is there onything in the history o' this world mair pathetic than the onselfish devotion, the perfect idolatry o' thae auld Jacobites tae that unworthy yellow-headed pretender ? Whaur was the world-famed "canniness" o' the Scotch character then ? Could an' calkilatin' ! Hooever we got that character I dinna ken, unless it be that we dinna wear oor hearts on oor sleeves for daws to pick at. A' the same, let me warn ye that a genuine Scotchman, sae faur frae bein' cauld, is naething mair or less than a smoulderin' volcano. He's made up something like this auld earth hersel—pretty rough ootside—lots o' warts on his character may be—here a layer o' fun, there a strong strata o' common sense, nae end o' gude red sand—an' so forth—but a' enclosin' a glowin' centre o' fire, that preserves an' tempers the hale machine. But Lord bless me, I'm clean aff the track a'thegither ! The craw I had tae pluck wi' fate was in no gettin' me born a Hielander ! Eh man ! the Gaelic is just beautifu'—though I dinna think I'll ever find it in ma heart to forgie Sheriff McKellar for the sly trick he played me that nicht. When I saw the

Sheriff gettin' up tae speak, I just gae Mrs. Airlie a nudge i' the ribs wi' ma elbow, an' says I, "noo we'll get something worth while," an' immediately baith o' us set tae wark an' hoastit a' the cobwebs oot o' oor throats, just as we were wont tae dae in the kirk at hame, after layin' doon oor Bibles on the book-brood an' straughtenin' oorsels up wi' cockit lugs tae hear a gude sermon frae a strange minister. An' there we were, a' lugs an' een, when the Sheriff got up—an' pittin' his twa hands on the back o' a chair, an' rasin' forrit, began his speech in Gaelic. Mrs. Airlie was sae mad that she got up an' gaed oot—he wasna gaun tae stand up there an' mak a fule o' her, she said—an' here I had tae gang a' that lang road hame at eleven a clock at nicht without ma wife tae tak care o' me ! Weel, there I sat like a born idiot, as sober as an owl, an' a' the folk in the hall shriekin' an' laughin' like mad at the Sheriff's droll jokes. An' the warst o't was, a smairt young halflin', wi' black hair an' blue een, an' a most beautifu' bucket o' flooers preened intill his buttonhole (by his sweetheart nae doot), he wad gie me aye the 'tither prod tae emphaseeze the fine pints o' the speech, an' me no kennin' a blessed word o't, but sittin' there like a cuif that had been brocht intae this world without either hearin' or horns ! At first I thoct when he began tae gie me a dig here an' there in the exooberance o' his Hielan' speerits (I dinna mean tae here insiniwate onything connectit wi' the Scott Act), that possibly he micht hae an e'e tae ma watch an' chain—but a'e squint o' his weeltaured coontenance dispelled that idea, an' then I had heard that he was a *Mail* reporter, an' a representative o' the clan Fraser tae boot. Anither thing, I hadna ma watch on me, but just wore the chain tae please Mrs. Airlie.

But oh, thae Gaelic sangs ! They keep hummin' an' hummin' in ma very dreams—that bonnie ane whaur a' the congregation joins in the chorus, an' gangs this way :

" Oh Ailie you're hunky doree ! doree !
Oh Ailie you're hunky doree ! doree ! "

Of course I dinna pretend tae say thae were the exack words, but that's what they soounded like tae me awa back whaur I was sittin'. But I fairly lost my heart tae the lassie (Mrs. Airlie had gaun hame by this time) wha sang that last Hielan' sang. The Gaelic music is sae tender an' sweet an' waefu', sae wierd an' sae far awa ; its the trill o' the laivrock in a dewy simmer mornin' ; the saft murmur o' the tide creepin' up oot owre the dulce-covered rocks ; the sad sough o' the wind through strings o' harps Eolian. Its the music o' the mist when it bursts intae flame at the mornin' kiss o' the sun—an' oh, waes me ! the music o' a leal an' warm-hearted people driven oot frae their native hills an' glens tae mak room for — game !

Ye see, somehow I had gotten a most extraordinar' notion o' the Gaelic. I aye thoct it had to be croakit instead o' spoken. This impression, nae doot, was deepened by me ha'en tae read that Gaelic column in the *Mail* every week tae Mistress Airlie. It's like tae break ilka tooth in my head every time I tackle it, an' sometimes I tak the cramp in ma tongue, but Mrs. Airlie aye insists that its a pity no tae encourage ony weel-meant effort, sae I manage tae warsle through the fearfu' ordeal, an' after moppin' the sweat aff ma throbbin' broo' I generally tak a thimblefu' o' beef, iron and wine, tae bring me tae again. But Gaelic, as I heard it spoken an' sang at the Gaelic society was a maist delightfu' an' ever tae be remembered revelation. Sae why—an' what for was I no born a Hielander ?

HUGH AIRLIE.